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An Inquiry into the best Method of communicating Religious Knowledge to Young Men.

A

SERMON

PREACHED

AT

EXETER,

BEFORE THE

ASSEMBLY

OF

Protestant Dissenting Ministers,

MAY 7, 1788,

By *TIMOTHY KENRICK.*

EXETER:

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MUSEUM BRITTANICUM

TO THE

MINISTERS

Of the ASSEMBLY

OF THE

COUNTIES

OF

Devon and Cornwall,

THIS DISCOURSE,

Publiſhed at their Requeſt,

Is Moſt Reſpectfully Inſcribed,

By the AUTHOR,

T. KENRICK.

BRITISH MUSEUM

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THE plan propoſed in the following diſcourſe, was formed with a particular view to the circumſtances of Proteſtant Diſſenters. This will account to readers of different ſentiments, into whoſe hands it may come, for ſome of the obſervations which it contains, and be deemed a ſufficient apology for them, if any ſhould be thought neceſſary.

However the ſubject of this inquiry, merits the attention of Chriſtians of every denomination, who are concerned for the religious education of the young. The work as it is now generally conducted, is left unfiniſhed by neglecting to cultivate the mind in the moſt critical and important period of life. Some perſons have expreſſed an earneſt wiſh, that the reſpectable body of men who are engaged in the ſupport or direction of Sunday Schools, would take this matter into conſideration.

Much

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Much room is ſtill left for extending and perfecting their plan: And it has been apprehended, that upon the hints here ſuggeſted, a method might be formed, for inſtructing perſons of this age, adapted to the nature of thoſe inſtitutions. If the preſent publication ſhould lead them or others to employ their thoughts upon the ſubject, and thereby contribute in any degree to improve the preſent mode of education, the Author will think that it has anſwered a very uſeful purpoſe.

Tit. ii. 6.

Young Men likewiſe exhort to be ſober minded.

THE inſtruction of the young has engaged the attention of the preſent age in more than an ordinary degree. Perſons of the moſt extenſive knowledge, and reſpectable talents, have condeſcended to employ them in promoting this deſign. In their zeal to accompliſh it more effectually, they have been willing to deviate much from the maxims and cuſtoms of former times; by commencing their labours, at a period of life, when the human mind was deemed to be incapable of improvement, and by employing thoſe portions of time, which have been held ſacred to religion, or devoted to pleaſure. Knowledge ſeems to be no longer regarded, as the prerogative of the great and opulent; but men have been anxious to communicate the benefits of it to the loweſt claſs of Society, by teaching them the uſeful art, by which it is principally acquired. Nor, amidſt this general concern to furniſh young minds with

with the means of obtaining knowledge, has the importance of receiving religious inſtructions, and religious habits, at this period of life, been entirely over-looked; it has been endeavoured to accuſtom them to both early, as the beſt foundation of future excellence; although it is ſtill to be wiſhed, that a greater, and more general attention ſhould be paid to this part of the ſubject.

Theſe endeavours, however lightly they may be thought of by ſome, are wiſe and benevolent, for every exertion of the faculties of the mind is beneficial, and every religious impreſſion of infinite moment: They deſerve the praiſe and encouragement of all the friends of true religion. The benefits which will be derived from them, cannot, indeed, at preſent be fully aſcertained, becauſe the experiment has not had ſufficient trial; but we may reaſonably look for the moſt important effects, and pleaſe ourſelves with the hope, that a new, and ſuperior ſtate of Society, both with reſpect to knowledge and piety, will ſoon ariſe. That period, which ſhall exhibit to the world, ſo new and ſingular an appearance as A NATION OF READERS, in which the labours of the preſent day will probably terminate, will, without doubt, be regarded as an important Æra in the Hiſtory of that Country where it exiſts, if not of the World in general.

But

But while ſo much attention has been deſervedly paid to the inſtruction of children of the earlieſt age, and of every condition, the wants of young perſons, a little further advanced in life, have not, I apprehend, been ſufficiently regarded; and while they continue to be thus neglected, the object of other good deſigns will be, in a great meaſure defeated. I refer to that period of life which is uſually employed in acquiring the knowledge of ſome uſeful profeſſion, and generally conſiſts of five or ſeven years. As ſoon as young perſons arrive at this ſeaſon, if not for ſome time before, that courſe of ſeparate inſtruction, which they received in private from their Parents or Miniſter, is diſcontinued, and they are conſigned entirely to the influence of thoſe diſcourſes, which are delivered in public to a mixed audience, conſiſting of perſons of various ages, conditions, and capacities: From this time they are conſidered as upon a level with the oldeſt Members of a Chriſtian Society, and as not requiring any further proviſion for their improvement or ſecurity, than what *they* enjoy.

Whether this idea be juſt, and the practice founded upon it proper, or whether ſomething more ought not to be done, to enlighten the minds and form the conduct of young perſons at this time of life, is what I now propoſe to conſider. But before I proceed, I muſt deſire, that what ſhall be ſug-

geſted, may be regarded as matter of inquiry and diſcuſſion, rather than an opinion, which I preſume to recommend to others. Viewed in this light the ſubject is important, and appears to deſerve the attention of all.

It muſt be acknowledged, that the time of which I have been ſpeaking, is an important portion of human life, capable of much improvement and of being made the foundation of invaluable future benefits; but at the ſame time, a ſeaſon of great danger to the virtue of young perſons; on which account, it demands the ſerious regard of thoſe, who would conſult their happineſs.

The paſſions and appetites arrive, during this time, at their utmoſt degree of vigour; but the underſtanding, although capable of comparing and arranging ideas, and of higher exerciſes than thoſe of mere memory, has not acquired that maturity of judgment or extent of knowledge, which are neceſſary to controul and regulate theſe propenſities. Criminal pleaſures wear an alluring aſpect in the eyes of the young, becauſe the danger and deceitfulneſs of them have not yet been diſcovered. At this ſeaſon, the counſels and warnings of a Parent would be of great uſe to young men; but they are generally deprived of this benefit, by being committed to the care of a Maſter, who is

ſeldom

ſeldom poſſeſſed of that affection and authority, which would qualify him to diſcharge with ſucceſs the difficult office of a counſellor and friend. The few principles which have been imbibed at an earlier period, will have but little influence upon the mind, from the want of being frequently inculcated, and continually kept in view; and it will be well, if for this reaſon they be not entirely forgotten. When thus ſtrongly allured by pleaſure, impelled by violent paſſions, and deprived of the ſupport of good principles, as well as of the advice of his beſt friend, who can be ſurprized, if the unexperienced youth ſhould yield to temptation, and by frequently committing the ſame crime, ſoon form a vicious habit of the moſt dangerous nature?

It may be imagined, that the public diſcourſes on religious topicks, which perſons of all ages are allowed to attend, do every thing that can be done by human power, to preſerve the young from falling into this evil; but there is great reaſon to fear, that theſe diſcourſes are not underſtood by them, or that they are comprehended with difficulty; for being adapted to the underſtanding of the majority of thoſe that compoſe the audience, who are men, they are uſually above the capacity of perſons, who have not yet attained that age; many things are taken for granted in them, which they need to have proved, and they

are full of words, reaſonings, and alluſions, which they do not underſtand; or, if ſuch diſcourſes are not abſolutely above their comprehenſion, yet requiring cloſe and painful attention of mind, they ſoon become weary of, and abandon an employment which is ſo laborious, and in which they are perplexed with difficulties at every ſtep. Thus a habit of diſregarding religious diſcourſes, is acquired early in life, which will probably never be broken, notwithſtanding the cauſe from which it firſt proceeded, the difficulty of underſtanding them, may in part be removed.

Beſides this, theſe diſcourſes labour under another defect, which ſeems to render them inadequate to the wants of the young. However well ſuited they may be to enforce particular duties, when attended too and underſtood, they do not appear equally calculated to convey a clear and comprehenſive view of religion.

There are many ſubjects of acknowledged importance, which are ſeldom inſiſted upon from the pulpit, either becauſe they are not ſuited to the common wants or taſte of a mixed audience, or becauſe moſt of the hearers are ſuppoſed to be ſufficiently acquainted with them already—ſuch as the proofs of the Being, Attributes, and Providence of God, the Evidences of the divine origin of the Chriſtian Religion,

ligion, with ſeveral other things, that might be mentioned; which, although they may be familiar to ſome, are but little known to many, particularly the younger members of the Society. If theſe and other uſeful ſubjects *ſhould* be handled in this place, yet they are treated in a number of independent diſcourſes, delivered at different times, or they are incidentally mentioned along with many other things.

In this way it is poſſible that the preacher may deliver to his hearers, in the courſe of ſome years, a complete ſyſtem of divine truth; but the ſeveral parts of it will be ſo much divided, diſperſed, and involved with other matter, that it muſt be very difficult for any perſon, of whatever age he may be, much more for the young, to obtain a clear and connected view of the whole. Such a work, if poſſible to ſome, requires greater penetration and care, than can be expected from the generality of mankind. From hence it ariſes, that notwithſtanding, they conſtantly attend the ordinances of religion, and hear its doctrines explained, at different times, through their whole life, men frequently acquire nothing better than a confuſed idea of religious truth: Whereas, what is to direct our conduct while here, and lays the foundation of our hopes hereafter, ought to be clearly and fully underſtood, and it is evident, that unleſs this be the caſe, it will have but a feeble and partial effect upon our actions.

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The imperfection of this method of inſtruction will further appear, if we conſider the uſual way of communicating knowledge upon other ſubjects. In no other branch of knowledge, would the teacher think himſelf at liberty to begin any where indifferently, without regard to order, or the abilities of thoſe whom he has to inſtruct; but to convey a clear view of the ſubject, in a ſhort time, he begins with few, eaſy, and fundamental principles, which being fully underſtood, he proceeds to other truths, built upon the former, yet more complex and difficult of comprehenſion; from theſe he advances to things ſtill more difficult, and of a higher order. In this gradual manner the mind is, without any painful exertion, made acquainted with a whole ſcience, conſiſting of numerous propoſitions and reaſonings. An attempt to teach ſuch a ſcience, by communicating the whole at once, or by beginning in any part would be regarded as highly inconvenient, and very unlikely to prove ſucceſsful.

Were a method to be adopted of communicating religious truth to young perſons of this age, ſimilar to what is thus obſerved in teaching them other things, by beginning with few ſimple principles, by uſing familiar language and eaſy illuſtrations, by often repeating to them the ſame things, and by following throughout, a connected orderly arrangement,

ment, moſt of thoſe difficulties, which now diſguſt or diſcourage them, would be removed. Having a guide whom they could follow, becauſe he did not lead them too faſt for their ſtrength, they would be led with eaſe and pleaſure into the knowledge of the moſt important truths of religion.

I am aware that it may be ſaid here, that the Scriptures, by neglecting the rules of ſtrict method in communicating divine truth, juſtify us in diſregarding them alſo. And it muſt be acknowledged, that in neither the Old nor New Teſtament the doctrines of religion are ſet before us in a regular ſyſtem, but delivered at different times, as occaſions ſuggeſted or required. With reſpect to this matter, God has acted in the ſame manner in the revelation of his will, as in the natural world where ſtrict order is obſerved, and all things are intimately connected together; but that order and this connection he has left us to diſcover, by the uſe of our rational powers. This, however, is no eaſy work, in reſpect to natural appearances, if we attempt to do it by the mere light of our own minds, without the aſſiſtance of others; nor is it without its difficulty, in regard to religion. And although no one can claim to himſelf authority infallibly to interpret the laws of the Goſpel, any more than thoſe of Nature, yet the labours of thoſe who have collected and arranged them, will greatly help

help the young, in acquiring a clear and ſpeedy knowledge of the ſubject.

It ſhould alſo be remembered, that the Goſpel of Chriſt was addreſſed to thoſe who had the underſtanding and knowledge of men, and who did not need ſuch helps as are neceſſary for perſons of inferior age; yet even then we find our Saviour very careful not to diſguſt his Diſciples by attempting to teach them too many things at once, or ſuch as were above their comprehenſion, and defering his inſtructions on ſeveral ſubjects till they were able to bear them.

The ſame prudent conduct was obſerved by the Apoſtles with regard to their firſt converts, as may be ſeen by ſeveral parts of their Epiſtles*. They did not indeed divide the Churches eſtabliſhed by them, into diſtinct claſſes, according to the different ages of the members, in order to inſtruct them in the Chriſtian Religion, for the ſubject was at that time, new to men of every age, and where all are equally ignorant, or well informed, the ſame plan of inſtruction may be ſuitable to the wants of all. However, we learn from the text, as well as from many other inſtances, that they deemed it right to adapt their exhortations to the various ages and conditions of men, being ſenſible, no doubt, what ſtrong impreſ-

* See particularly 1 Cor. iii. 1. 2. Heb. v. 11.—14.

ſions

ſions are made upon the mind, by addreſſes founded upon ſuch circumſtances. In the preſent time, when the perſons, who compoſe a congregation of Chriſtians, are ſo widely removed from one another in reſpect to knowledge and improvement, when ſome are ignorant of the firſt principles of Chriſtianity, while others have made it the object of their careful attention for many years; different ſubjects and methods of inſtruction, ſeem to be required, adapted to the reſpective wants of each. The firſt ſhould be fed with *milk*, the latter with *ſtrong meat*: To give to both the ſame food, is to withhold from one of them proper nouriſhment.

If a courſe of ſeparate inſtruction, then, be neceſſary or deſirable for the younger part of a Chriſtian Society, in order to prepare them for what is more general; it may be aſked, in what it ſhall conſiſt, and to what objects ſhall it be directed? I muſt requeſt your indulgence once more, while I ſtate to you in what manner it appears to me, the time of young perſons at this ſeaſon of life, may be moſt uſefully employed, deſiring you ſtill to keep in mind, what I have ſuggeſted before, that I am purſuing an inquiry, and not laying down rules.

To theſe queſtions it may be anſwered in general, that the object propoſed by this inſtruction, ſhould

be to explain ſuch things, as are important in themſelves, but not uſually inſiſted upon in public diſcourſes, or ſuch as are taught with peculiar advantage in private. The ſubjects which follow, appear to come under one part or the other of this deſcription.

To eſtabliſh in the mind a firm conviction of the exiſtence, and juſt apprehenſions of the perfections of God, from arguments founded upon the light of nature, is a matter of the higheſt conſequence, both becauſe theſe things are important in themſelves, and muſt lie at the foundation of all religion, and alſo becauſe it is rather taken for granted, than proved in the Scriptures, that there is a God. The beſt proof and eaſieſt illuſtration of this ſubject, are derived from the works of nature. This argument is level to the capacities of all who are able to reflect, and abounds with ſo many inſtances of extraordinary power, wiſdom, and goodneſs, as render it highly intereſting to the mind, as well as inſtructive: But, if any difficulties ſhould be found in the ſubject, by young perſons, various methods may be uſed to render it plain to *them*, which could not be adopted without offence, before a congregation. By thus diſcourſing to them familiarly of the Being and Attributes of God, we may hope to kindle in their breaſts

at

at an early period, ſentiments of piety and devotion, which will have a powerful influence upon the conduct and happineſs of future life.

From the doctrines of natural religion, it may be proper to proceed to the evidence of what is revealed. It is deſirable that every Chriſtian, whatever his ſituation may be, ſhould for the ſatisfaction of his own mind, be acquainted with the ground upon which the Goſpel Hiſtory is received as authentic: But it is become abſolutely neceſſary in a country where freedom of inquiry is permitted in every ſubject, and men of all ſentiments are allowed to ſpeak, and write their opinions without reſerve. In ſuch a country we ſometimes ſee the cauſe of Chriſtianity openly and boldly attacked, but more frequently we preceive the poiſon of infidelity, conveyed by more ſecret, yet not leſs dangerous methods, by the pleaſing vehicle of hiſtory, and covered with the ſpecious name of friendſhip. From company or books every one will hear the objections which are raiſed by unbelievers againſt the Chriſtian Revelation, and unleſs he be furniſhed with an immediate anſwer to them, they will make a deep and very unfavourable impreſſion upon his mind; for men liſten with a willing ear to every argument that is urged againſt Chriſtianity, becauſe the reſtraints which it impoſes upon their paſſions, are irkſome, and they are ever ready to free themſelves

from them, if they can be ſupplied with a fair pretence. But when young perſons have been once made acquainted with the objections and artifices of unbelievers, and inſtructed in what way they may defend themſelves and their religion againſt both, they may afterwards be expoſed to them without danger.

To the evidences of the Chriſtian Religion, might be added a ſummary view of the doctrines which it contains, accompanied with thoſe paſſages of Scripture, upon which each is founded. If Chriſtians in general are to be made acquainted with theſe important truths, this appears to be the moſt proper ſeaſon of life for the purpoſe. For the mind is capable of underſtanding them, when taught in the way before mentioned, and being as yet unbiaſſed in favour of error, will be diſpoſed to receive the truth when propoſed to it, without fear or ſuſpicion.—An advantage which cannot certainly be obtained at any future time. Doctrines now believed will take firm hold of the mind, and produce their full effect; whereas, if they are received at a later period, their influence will be proportionably diminiſhed. Two evils, very common among thoſe who profeſs themſelves Chriſtians, but oppoſite to each other, would alſo be prevented by adopting this practice, that of having no ſentiments at all in religion, or entertaining warmly ſuch as are without foundation. For notwithſtanding that ſome of the doctrines thus taught,

taught, may be ſubjects of much debate in the world, the conſequences of intemperate zeal, and unreaſonable contempt for thoſe who think differently, might be obviated by inculcating early upon the mind, the neceſſity of candour and moderation.

From collecting together and explaining the doctrines of the Chriſtian Religion, it will be found a natural and eaſy tranſition to point out the principal deviations from the truth which Chriſtians have made, either in matters of faith or diſcipline, particularly in the Church of Rome, and the eſtabliſhed Church of England. The errors of the firſt deſerve attention, on account of the number of thoſe who embrace them, forming the largeſt portion of the Chriſtian World. Young men of the preſent day, who have been educated in different principles, are in little danger of falling into ſuch abſurdities, yet as many of them, for the purpoſes of curioſity or commerce, viſit foreign countries, in which popery is the eſtabliſhed religion; it is deſirable that they ſhould themſelves ſee, that as it is not ſupported by reaſon, ſo it hath no foundation in the word of God, leſt imagining this and every other ſyſtem, which prevails among Chriſtians, to be equally countenanced by the Scriptures, they ſhould regard all as equally unimportant. And it deſerves to be conſidered, whether that want of attachment to any particular mode of worſhip (not to ſay to religion itſelf) which

which is ſo viſible in the generality of thoſe who have travelled from their native country, does not ſpring from this ſource.

The controverſy between us and the eſtabliſhed Church of this kingdom, although important and intereſting, through want of care to make the younger members of our Societies acquainted with it, is very little known by many Lay Diſſenters: Who therefore cannot aſſign any better reaſon for their ſeparation, than that they have been educated in different habits. But how uncertain a ſecurity theſe habits alone are for their continuance among us, when unſupported by principle and oppoſed by argument and intereſt, I need not ſay. The Proteſtant Diſſenters, while they were aggrieved by the ſeverity of penal ſtatutes, examined themſelves and taught their children the principles of that diſſent, which expoſed them to ſo many evils; but as our ſufferings and terrors are removed by the repeal or ſuſpenſion of theſe laws, the ſubject appears leſs intereſting, and is ſuffered to fall into oblivion. However, if a ſeaſon of tranquillity and repoſe, is more likely to be injurious to our cauſe as Diſſenters, (as well as to the cauſe of Chriſtianity in general), than a ſtate of perſecution, this attention to the ground of ſeparation, ought to be revived, and continually maintained with the utmoſt care.

It may be allowed, that the duties of life are inforced with greater efficacy, in public than in private,

vate, before a large audience than a ſmall one, where the paſſions are to be moved, as well as the judgment informed; yet many advantages would be obtained, by giving a brief view of all our moral obligations, in a ſeparate courſe of private inſtruction; for we ſhould then be ſure that no duty of importance was left unexplained to the young, and that they would know what every relation in life required from them, before they entered upon it. Whereas, by confining ourſelves entirely to the preſent method of public inſtruction, in which no regular plan is purſued; ſome important obligations may be overlooked, through inadvertence, and others never inculcated, or but ſlightly touched, on account of the difficulty of explaining them before a mixed audience. Both theſe inconveniencies might be avoided, by adopting the method of which I am ſpeaking. By this means, inſtead of leaving men in their tranſactions with each other, to form a ſyſtem of commercial morality for themſelves, which we may be aſſured, will lean to the ſide of ſelf-intereſt, in the maxims which it eſtabliſhes, and be very different in many inſtances, from thoſe which truth and juſtice require, we ſhould be able to ſtore the minds of young perſons, with with general principles of equity, that would direct them to behave with perfect integrity and honour, in whatever profeſſion they might afterwards be engaged.

It has been long and juſtly lamented, that many whoſe conduct is in moſt reſpects irreproachable, and who regularly attend the other ordinances of religious worſhip, ſhould neglect one, as expreſsly commanded as any. This neglect may ariſe from different cauſes, but of whatever kind the ſcruples may be, which keep perſons of this character from the Lord's Supper; it muſt be acknowledged, that this is the beſt ſeaſon for removing them, if already imbibed, or for guarding the mind againſt their admiſſion. It is poſſible, indeed, if nothing ſhould be done now to give young perſons juſt views of this ordinance, that from reading their own reflections, or publick diſcourſes, they may acquire better ſentiments afterwards, and be diſpoſed to join their fellow Chriſtians in celebrating it; but having neglected their duty ſo long, they will then be aſhamed to begin a practice, which ought to have been commenced much earlier. Thus they are led to diſobey a clear command of Chriſt, during life: At firſt from miſtaken notions of the nature of what he enjoined, afterwards from an unworthy principle of ſhame. The moſt effectual remedy for this evil ſeems to be, to inſtruct all the younger members of the Society, in the nature and deſign of the Lord's Supper, and to introduce to it, at an early period, thoſe who are of a ſerious temper and good behaviour. There may be ſome difference of opinion among Chriſtians about

about the time when it is proper to admit perſons to this ordinance; yet no one can think it premature at this age, if they have paſſed through ſuch a courſe of religious inſtruction, as has been above deſcribed.

I have now ſtated, what appears to me, to be wanting to complete the religious inſtruction of young perſons, in that interval of their life, which occurs between the time of leaving a place of ordinary education, and a mature age. The whole of the plan, which has been now ſuggeſted, may not in ſome ſituations be neceſſary, while in other places more may be required. It muſt therefore be left to the judgment of the Miniſter, who is to conduct it, to enlarge, or contract the ſcheme, according to the wants of thoſe, who are to be inſtructed.

A deſign of this nature, whether it be executed on a larger or a ſmaller ſcale, will neceſſarily be attended with ſome difficulties, but they are by no means ſo great as to render the whole, and every part of it impracticable, nor ſuch as to produce objections of much weight. There are but two, that appear to deſerve conſideration.

It may be ſaid, that it will be found to be difficult, if not impoſſible, to perſwade the young perſons in a Religious Society, to attend their Miniſter

in theſe private lectures, from an idea that they would thereby be degraded to the condition of children.

This prejudice, which it muſt be acknowledged would occaſion ſome difficulty at firſt, ariſes entirely from the cuſtom which now prevails, of diſmiſſing catechumens at a very early age. Were a contrary practice to be introduced, and the time of receiving inſtruction generally prolonged, it would ſoon ceaſe to appear diſhonourable. In other ſubjects they think it no diſgrace to be conſidered in the character of learners at this time of life, and are very thankful for all the information and aſſiſtance which they can obtain. Why then ſhould they be unwilling to accept of direction here? Beſides, from the general attention which is paid to the ſubject of education, and the readineſs with which plans for improving it are adopted, there is reaſon to hope, that one attended with ſo many advantages as the preſent, would be generally approved, and that Parents would imploy their influence to prevail with their children to ſubmit to it. At leaſt the contrary ought not to be taken for granted, before the trial has been made.

It may further be objected, with more appearance of reaſon, by thoſe who are to communicate this inſtruction, that the burthen which already lies upon them, ariſing from the ſtated and occaſional duties of their office, is as heavy as they can well bear, and

that

that ſo much extraordinary ſervice added to what is at preſent too great, would render it inſupportable.

Let it be remembered, however, that although it may require time and pains, to provide and arrange the materials neceſſary for ſuch a courſe of private inſtruction, there would be no occaſion to renew the ſame labour annually. To every freſh claſs of attendants, the ſame ſubjects and diſcourſes will be new; and there is the ſame ground to go over every following year as the preceeding, with ſuch alterations only, as cloſer and repeated inſpection may ſuggeſt. After the firſt time the whole work would be reduced to little more than the labour of delivery.

But the moſt ſatisfactory anſwer to both theſe objections is, to point out the advantages which are likely to ariſe from adopting this ſcheme. The benefits which will be produced by the ſeveral parts of it, have been already mentioned. It only remains that I briefly enumerate a few of thoſe which we may expect from the whole.

To have religious ideas, comprehended with eaſe and familiarized to the mind, at an early period of life, is no ſmall advantage, conſidering how difficult it is for us to raiſe our thoughts above ſenſible objects, and that when the foundation of knowledge

and piety is well laid, it is eaſy to build upon it afterwards. The mind is not only improved for the preſent, but alſo laid open to future inſtruction, and good impreſſions. Being accuſtomed betimes, to think and reflect, young perſons will acquire at leaſt a reliſh for intellectual pleaſures, and be diverted from the purſuit of ſenſual gratifications, which are ſo captivating at this age; by which means they will be preſerved from vice if not rendered virtuous.

But under the bleſſing of God, more ſolid benefits may reaſonably be expected from what is now propoſed. As the paſſions are at this time ſtrong, and the mind not bent to any particular purſuit, by giving it early, juſt ideas of God, as he appears in the works of nature, and eſpecially of that wonderful and gracious ſcheme, which he has formed for the ſalvation of mankind, by Jeſus Chriſt, deep impreſſions of a religious nature, may probably be made; which, being often repeated, would ſoon form a ſettled habit of piety. By this means, the fatal conſequences of early wickedneſs would be prevented, and a virtuous conduct firmly eſtabliſhed. Had this method of inſtruction been adopted, many, who are now the ſlaves of ſin, and on the road to certain deſtruction, might have been preſerved from ruin.

But the only ſeaſon, in which the paſſions could be ſubdued, and the mind formed to a right temper, being

being neglected, every future attempt for this purpose becomes ineffectual. In the underſtanding, which is unfurniſhed with the principles of religious knowledge, there is nothing which the Preacher can *work upon*, and his beſt diſcourſes produce no valuable effect: He will not even be attended to, or cannot be underſtood; or ſhould he be able to convince the ſinner of his guilt and danger, yet the ſinful habits in which he is bound, cannot be broken. Over the deplorable condition of ſuch men we may mourn and lament, but our endeavours to ſave them are almoſt hopeleſs. They will probably proceed from one degree of wickedneſs to another, till they have filled up the meaſure of iniquity.

Such are the conſequences of neglecting to improve this period of life. On the other hand, were all the members of our Societies well inſtructed at this time, inſtead of young perſons ignorant of the plaineſt principles of religion, and ſtrangers to every appearance of vital Chriſtianity, wholly immerſed in the purſuit of buſineſs or pleaſure, corrupting the preſent generation of men, and entailing corruption upon many generations to come, we ſhould behold riſing up, a race of men, devout, candid, and intelligent, ornaments to the religion they profeſs by their piety, wiſdom, and regularity, and zealous for the ſupport of it in the world, who, when they paſſed from honour

nour and comfort in this life, to certain and diſtinguiſhed glory in the next, would leave behind them ſucceſſors of equal worth with themſelves. From ſuch a change, what happy conſequences might we not expect? How ſerviceable would it be to the cauſe of Chriſtian liberty in which we are engaged, by attaching to it, both the parents and their children, by furniſhing them with abilities, and inſpiring them with zeal to defend their own principles, and to overthrow thoſe of their opponents? What honour would it reflect on the cauſe of Chriſtianity itſelf, the maſter whom we ſerve, and thoſe who have been the inſtruments in the hands of God, in accompliſhing ſo important a revolution.

It would be no ſmall comfort to the Chriſtian Miniſters to addreſs a people, who, he is ſure, will underſtand what he delivers to them, and be made better by his diſcourſes, if it be not owing to their own negligence. To the older members of the Society, his publick labours will be more acceptable, by being confined to ſubjects of general utility; while in return for the concern which he has ſhewn for the improvement and happineſs of his younger brethren, he may expect from them, a high degree of gratitude and affection, which will be the ſource of much benefit to both. If he is entering upon life, how de-

lightful

lightful will it be, to ſurvey thoſe around him, who will be valuable companions and friends as long as he lives, and reward him for all his labours in old age. When he arrives at that period, life may be reſigned without reluctance, ſince he leaves behind him in the world men of ſo promiſing a character. With ſuch a proſpect in view, he may depart in peace, like the aged Saint in the Goſpel, after he had held the Saviour in his arms.

Upon the whole, if the aid of an inſtructor is moſt wanted, when reaſon is feeble, and the paſſions moſt violent; if it be more eaſy to form the young to a religious temper than the aged, if it be better to prevent evils than to correct them; if inſtilling into the minds of young perſons, ſeeds of knowledge and piety is of the utmoſt conſequence to their preſent and eternal welfare—then is the plan of inſtruction which I have endeavoured to explain of great utility, and worthy to be adopted.

I ſhall only add as a further inducement to engage in this deſign, that the ſoil we have here to cultivate is new. What the old will produce, we already know by the experience of many ages, nor is it likely that a better method of cultivation can be diſcovered, after ſo many trials. But this is a field which has ſcarcely yet been touched, and which may abound

abound in riches, of which we are little aware. Let us at leaſt try what it will produce.

If however, all our expectations ſhould be diſappointed, if neither by inſtructing the young, nor admoniſhing the aged, we can make men wiſe unto ſalvation, when both have failed of ſucceſs, we may then ſay, and not before, that we have done all that we were able to do.

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